DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 279 040 CS 505 504

AUTHOR Kane, Peter E.
TITLE The Origins and Agenda of the Accuracy in Academia Movement.
PUB DATE Nov 86
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (72nd, Chicago, IL, November 13-16, 1986).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Freedom; Activism; Censorship; *Freedom of Information; *Freedom of Speech; Information Networks; Information Services; Information Transfer; *Intellectual Freedom; Mass Media; Moral Issues; News Media; News Reporting; Political Issues; Sanctions; *Social Control; *Social Influences; Television; Textbook Bias; Textbook Content; Textbook Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS *Accuracy in Academia; Accuracy in Media

ABSTRACT

A careful look at the philosophy and programs of the reactionary right shows that prominent among their activities is an assault on freedom of thought and communication. The reactionary right does not believe in the democratic idea of accountability, recognizes that accountability depends upon information, and works unceasingly to keep that information "secret." Television news and schools are important elements in an overall program of thought control, so ultraconservative groups like Accuracy in Media dedicate themselves to pressuring broadcasters to conform to their philosophy, while others like Eagle Forum pressure educators to eliminate such classroom subjects as values clarification, alcohol and drug education, any "globalism" study, or evolution. The goal is the complete elimination of information that does not conform to their ideology. Accuracy in Academia has been created to be the cutting edge of this ongoing campaign, taking the agenda to the college level where they hope to conquer the last center for a free marketplace of ideas. Because their program is so completely outside the mainstream of American political thought, it is easy to underestimate the threat to the principles of freedom of expression posed by the totalitarians of the reactionary right, but identifying the nature of the opposition is a first step in the fight against them. (NKA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED279040

The Origins and Agenda of the Accuracy in Academia Movement

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Peter E. Kane

State University of New York

College at Brockport

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Peter E. Kane

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Taken by itself the so-called Accuracy in Academia campaign looks to most of us like some kind of misguided quixotic crusade to be viewed in large part as no more than an amusing minor annoyance. Robert Ehrlich's "Point of View" column in the May 21, 1986, issue of The Chronicle of Higher Education (p. 96) is a good example of this attitude. However, when Accuracy in Academia is recognized as a part of the reactionary right's ongoing campaign against freedom of thought, expression, and action in the United States; its real significance can be seen. In this presentation I will identify the clear agenda of the reactionary right, demonstrate the frightening success that they have achieved, and show how Accuracy in Academia has been created to be the cutting edge of this on-going campaign.

I

Although the reactionary right likes to wrap itself in the flag and spout patriotic slogans, a careful look at their philosophy and programs shows clearly a deeply grained, profound un-Americanism. These "un-American activities" begin with an assault on freedom of thought and communication. As George Orwell demonstrated in his book 1984 modern totalitarianism is more easily sustained by thought control than by physical repression, and the foundation of thought control is the control of access to and distribution of information.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CS505 504

On the matter of access to information the name of the game is secrecy. Within the federal government the claim of and justification for secrecy has spread from localized pockets of hard-liners to virtually every area of government activity. We cannot examine and evaluate the illegal covert activities of the Central Intelligence Agency because they are "secret." We cannot formulate informed opinions about military weapons and strategic planning because they are "secret." We cannot discover the full implications of policies of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission because they are "secret." We cannot find out if the President of the United States is a crook because the relevant information is "secret." And today there is hardly an agency of government that does not claim that its activities are "secret" in the name of "national security" meaning that the security of government agencies will be threatened if the citizens of the United States find out what is being done in their name. Then there is Assistant Secretary of State Elliot Abrams who refuses to be interviewed by or appear on programs with those who do not share his reactionary right outlook. Those who do not agree with him are labeled extremists who are "off the map. They're vipers. They trade in vicious ad hominem attacks. I would not wish to give publicity to these people" (Jay R. Begun, "The State Department's Patsy Picker," Columbia Journalism Review, September-October 1986, p. 10). Of course, Elliot Abrams would never stoop to an ad hominem attack. Before the ascendency of this reactionary right philosophy people believed that government should be held accountable for its actions. The reactionary right does not believe in the democratic idea of accountability, recognizes that accountability depends upon information, and works unceasingly to keep that information "secret."

From Spiro Agnew's speech in Des Moines, Iowa in November 1969 through William Casey's latest threat to seek prosecution of media representatives for espionage and other violations of the United States Code, the reactionary right has worked unceasingly to inhibit and prevent the distribution through the mass media of any information that runs contrary to their ideology. These two chronologically bracketing examples also illustrate the range of methodology for suppression from threats and extra-legal intimidations to attempts to use the courts as in the Pentagon Papers and Progressive cases. Note also the activities of the Meese Commission. While claiming to be concerned about porn, its principle targets have been Playboy and Penthouse. Neither magazine is obscene, but both contain editorial materials politically objectionable to the reactionary right. A focus on political content also helps to explain the otherwise inexplainable attempt to suppress the braille edition of Playboy which obviously contains no pictures. Individual vigilante groups such as Reed Irving's so-called Accuracy in Media also play a role here. The nature and content of Irving's complaints about television reporting demonstrate a complete lack of interest in accuracy. Rather they are coherent effort to force broadcasters to shape their programming to conform with Irving's reactionary right philosophy. The resources that are committed to these efforts demonstrate that these are recognized by the reactionary right as important elements in an overall program of totalitarian thought control.

Schools are a second major disseminator of information that must be controlled, and these are also under continuing attack. As Jerry Falwell said in America Can Be Saved (p. 162), "I hope that I live to see the day when, as in the early days of our country, we won't have any public schools." The only thing surprising about Falwell's statement is its candor regarding the agenda

of the reactionary right. And what exactly is wrong with the public schools? According to a 1985 Eagle Forum letter to its true believers suspect subjects include values clarification, discussion of religious or moral standards, discussions of death and dying, alcohol and drug education, nuclear war and nuclear policy education, one world government or any other "globalism" study, the study of human sexuality including population control and the roles of males and females, discussion of the supernatural or Eastern mysticism, or any consideration of the fundamental organizing principle of the biological sciences -- evolution (the full text of the letter can be found in the May 1985 issue of Harpers). In other words, teach addition, subtraction, multiplication, and spelling; but for God's sake don't teach children to think! In this context the clearly misnamed Accuracy in Academia can be seen for what it is -- an expanded effort to suppress in the college classroom ideas of which the reactionary right does not approve.

In sum what we see is the dangerous, totalitarian, and un-American philosophy of the reactionary right that clearly rejects the principles freedom of expression and the concept of a free marketplace of ideas. From schools to all media of communication the goal is the complete elimination information that does not conform to their ideology.

II

Because the program of the reactionary right is so completely outside the mainstream of American political thought, there is a tendency among rational people not to take this movement seriously. The result is that our very system of government is imperilled as the direct result of our failure to respond effectively to this threat. The frightening success of the reactionary right

is clear evidence that we have not heeded Thomas Jefferson's famous admonition that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." The results of our lack of vigilance can be seen everywhere.

We all recognize that print media -- magazines, newspapers, and the like -- are big business with a natural conservative orientation. Most of us expect our local press to select and present that news which conforms to this conservative outlook. We have come to accept the right wing mendacity of the big money national magazines such as TV Guide, Readers Digest, and Time. In the process we have failed to note the frightening rightward slide of the so-called "responsible" press. The New York Times and The Washington Post are prime examples. From its endorsements of Ed Koch through its uncritical total acceptance of the Reagan administration's terrorism nonsense and lies, The New York Times under Abe Rosenthal has moved substantially right of center in both its news columns and its editorial page. The Times position in the political spectrum is demonstrated by use of the label "radical" in a recent headline and story about Mother Jones, a journal for Yuppies with vaguely liberal inclinations. The New York Times Magazine ranks second only to Commentary as a journal of neoconservative opinion. In spite of the appearance given by the occasional William Casey threat, The Washington Post reports almost nothing that does not conform to the reactionary right ideology of the Reagan administration. The dissatisfaction of liberals and blacks with the Post's news coverage has even made the pages of The New York Times (Sept. 26, 1986, P. A21). An excellent illustration of the problem can be seen in the following: On the occasion of our massive independence celebration last July Contra thugs in Nicaguara blew up a bus killing thirty-four civilians including a family of thirteen, twelve women, and twelve children. While devoting many pages to the

hype of the Statue of Liberty non-centennial, neither The Times nor The Post nor any other major newspaper in the country took space to report this atrocity financed at least in part by American tax dollars. Ten days later The Times did make reference in another story to these "reported" deaths "attributed" to landmines planted not by "Contras" but by the "Nicaraguan Democratic Force" (July 19, 1986, p. 1). In fact there is no major liberal --or even middle of the road -- print source of news information in this country today.

The situation in the electronic media is no better. One need only sample the three network's evening news to see how thoroughly they conform to the Reagan reactionary right language and ideology. Notice what happened when ABC had the journalistic good judgment and integrity to offer its viewers a critical analysis and opposing view to President Reagan's military policy speech of last February 26. While the White House complaint to ABC was expected, what was unexpected was ABC's abject apology complete with assurances that such a slip would never happen again. Those supporting ABC's apology included Van Gordon Sauter, then President of CBS News, and Ben Bradlee, Executive Editor of The Washington Post. Articles by Michael Massing and Alan Wolfe in the September 13, 1986, issue of The Nation show in chilling detail the tactics and effectiveness of Accuracy in Media allied with other reactionary right groups in shaping broadcasting to their liking. No better example can be found than the agreement by the Public Broadcasting Service to broadcast an hour of AIM polemics in "response" to their thoughtful and objective thirteen hour history of the Vietnam war. Another classic example of the reactionary right's assault on electronic journalism was the Westmoreland suit against CBS. While CBS was sustained in this completely meritless suit, this assault undertaken and financed by the reactionary right nevertheless had

the desirable effect of draining CBS resources and perhaps making it reluctant to undertake special reports of this kind, particularly those critical of ideas and individuals on the right. It really goes without saying that no network coverage was given to the July 3 Contra murders.

For the last several years the ideological stance of the news media has been demonstrated by Professor Carl Jensen's Project Censored reports. Each year a panel of distinguished media critics selects the top ten "censored" stories of the year, the major events that received little or no attention by U.S. news media. Year after year the overwhelming majority of these stories deal with information that the reactionary right does not want reported. In the most recent report for the year 1985 four of the top five unreported stories fall into this category including the massive aerial bombardment of El Salvador that has resulted in a half million refugees, the military as an uncontrolled source of toxic wastes, and the Reagan administration's unremitting attack on civil liberties (Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom, July 1986, p. 109).

While the reactionary right's success in eliminating opposing views from the mass media is astounding, their success in the schools is truly frightening. The linchpin for this program for the dumbing of America is textbook control. American textbook publishers, for the good 100% American reason of maximizing profits, see a direct relationship between avoiding offense to anyone and expanding sales. In such a competitive marketplace, groups that are organized to take offense at publishers efforts, particularly where textbooks are selected on a statewide basis, have become extremely powerful. Mel and Norma Gabler and their so-called Educational Research Analysts in Texas are the definitive example of the reactionary right's power

to influence textbook content. In the field of literature Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet is reduced to pap. The entire Holt, Rinehart & Winston basic reading series has been successfully attacked in a federal court suit in Tennessee because, among other things, in a first grade story both Jim and Pat cook, but Jim cooks first thus denying the God-given sex roles of males and females. History books do not mention or gloss over unsavory chapters in American history such as this country's policy of genocide toward Native Americans or our repeated military interventions in Nicaragua going back to 1853 (133 years of interventionist history). Current high school texts say little about the Vietnam war, and what they do say is often untrue as, for example, the lie that the Hanoi government precipitated the war by violating the 1954 Geneva accords. As we all know, the truth is that the accords were broken by the French occupation government in Saigon at the urging of the Eisenhower administration.

A classic example of the assault on education by the reactionary right can be seen in the evolution of the treatment of evolution in biology and other life science textbooks. In the early years of this century the major books from major publishers accepted evolution as the basic organizing principle of biology and dealt with it in that manner. However, in the years following the Scopes trial in 1925 not only did this proper central focus disappear but also the word itself disappeared from the textbook writers' vocabulary with the result that explanations of principles and processes became incomprehensible nonsense whose only virtue was that of being acceptable to the Biblical fundamentalism of the reactionary right. The situation has become so bad that last year the California Board of Education was unable to find a single acceptable seventh/eighth grade life science text among those submitted by

seven major publishers. New York City's Board of Education has also been forced to reject texts on this same grounds of inadequacy (for a complete account see William J. Bennetta, Crusade of the Credulous [San Francisco: California Academy of Science Press, 1986]). However, last December the California Board of Education caved in to the publishers and accepted all seven books with all their gross errors and nothing more than sham revisions. Prentice-Hall's Life Science, one of the better books but still a case in point, equates scientific theory with myths and folktales, and the fundamentalist reactionary right scores another victory. Thus, while we have not been vigilant, the imposition of thought control in America has proceeded apace.

III

Comes now Accuracy in Academia to proceed with the dumbing of America at the college level. This last center for a free marketplace of ideas must be conquered, or students might read beyond page 50 of The Wealth of Nations to discover that Adam Smith clearly recognized that the basic principle of capitalism is personal greed -- a greed that must be carefully controlled by the state for the system to work. They might discover the true role of evolution as the explainer of most every "Why" question in the biological sciences. They might find out the truth about our interventions in Latin America, the Vietnam war, and other black pages in American history. And they might even begin to appreciate the variety of thought available in a free marketplace of ideas, to learn to think for themselves, and to reject the totalitarian thought control that the reactionary right has been working so hard to establish in the United States.

It is important to understand the nature of The Accuracy In Academia attack. Like AIM, it is not concerned with factual accuracy and only tangentially with interpretation of facts. Rather the demand is that college instruction should be congruent with the reactionary right's ideology. The facts of the real world are irrelevant to this ideology and the demands that it produces. Any teaching that does not conform this reactionary world view is by definition inaccurate. It is too easy to underestimate the threat to the principles of freedom of expression posed by the totalitarians of the reactionary right. The thought police are at the door, and we must do battle with the weapons at our disposal: clear identification of the nature of the opposition, free inquiry, and the vigorous and outspoken expression of the truth as we see it.